

What is claimed is:

1. A system for protecting a needle which comprises:
 - a holder for supporting the needle, the holder being formed with a first abutment and a second abutment;
 - 5 a guard moveable on the holder over the needle and having a surface formed with a cantilevered tab and an extension limiter, wherein the cantilevered tab is moveable between a stressed configuration with the cantilevered tab positioned for contact against the first abutment to prevent movement of the guard on the holder in a first direction, and an unstressed configuration wherein the cantilevered tab is flush with the surface of the guard to avoid contact with the first abutment; and
 - 10 a means for urging the cantilevered tab against the first abutment to maintain the cantilevered tab in its stressed configuration until the guard is moved in a second direction, the second direction being substantially opposite the first direction, to release the cantilevered tab from the first abutment for transition from its stressed configuration to its unstressed configuration, and for subsequently urging the guard in the first direction to cover the needle and place the extension limiter in contact with the second abutment to protect the needle by preventing movement of the guard back in the second direction.
2. A system as recited in claim 1 wherein the holder is substantially tubular shaped to define a longitudinal axis, and wherein the holder has an inner surface surrounding a lumen with the first abutment and the second abutment being formed on the inner surface of the holder.
- 25 3. A system as recited in claim 2 further comprising an adapter with the needle mounted thereon, the adapter being affixed to the inner surface of the holder to align the needle along the axis.

4. A system as recited in claim 3 further comprising a plurality of longitudinally oriented ribs mounted on the inner surface of the holder, the ribs individually extending from the inner surface of the holder with each rib having a detent for a snap engagement with the adapter.
5. A system as recited in claim 3 wherein the surface of the guard is formed with a pair of axially oriented ridges to create a groove for receiving one of the ribs therein to prevent rotation of the guard in the holder.
6. A system as recited in claim 3 wherein the guard is substantially tubular shaped and is formed with a lumen for receiving the needle therein, and further wherein the guard is positioned in the lumen of the holder for reciprocal axial movement over the needle in the first and second directions with the surface of the guard facing the inner surface of the holder.
7. A system as recited in claim 6 wherein the urging means is a spring positioned in the lumen of the guard between the guard and the adapter to urge the guard in the first direction along the axis.
8. A system as recited in claim 1 wherein the guard is sequentially moveable over the needle from an initial position wherein the cantilevered tab is urged against the first abutment and a distal portion of the needle extends from the guard, followed by a movement of the guard in the second direction to a retracted position wherein the cantilevered tab is released from the first abutment for transition to its unstressed configuration with further exposure of the needle, and a subsequent movement of the guard in the first direction to a final position wherein the guard covers the distal portion of the needle and the extension limiter is engaged with the proximal abutment to prevent an uncovering of the distal portion of the needle.

9. A system as recited in claim 8 further comprising a cover engageable with the holder to cover the distal portion of the needle when the needle is in its initial position.
10. A protective device for a needle which comprises:
- 5 a substantially tubular shaped holder defining a longitudinal axis and having an inner surface surrounding a lumen;
- a distal abutment formed on the inner surface of the holder;
- a proximal abutment formed on the inner surface of the holder;
- an adapter with the needle mounted thereon, the adapter being
- 10 affixed to the inner surface of the holder to align the needle along the axis;
- a substantially tubular shaped guard, wherein the guard is formed with a lumen for receiving the needle therein and is positioned in the lumen of the holder for reciprocal axial movement over the needle in a distal direction and in a proximal direction with an outer surface of the guard facing the inner surface of the holder;
- 15 a cantilevered tab formed on the guard, wherein the tab is deflectable from the outer surface of the guard and into a stressed configuration for engagement with the distal abutment to prevent movement of the guard in a distal direction, and further wherein, in response to a proximal movement of the guard, the tab is released from its stressed configuration for movement into an unstressed configuration wherein the cantilevered tab is flush with the outer surface of the guard and clear of any interaction with the holder;
- 20 a spring positioned in the lumen of the guard between the guard and the adapter to urge the guard in a distal direction along the axis to cover the needle when the cantilevered tab is in its unstressed configuration; and
- 25 an extension limiter formed on the guard and engageable with the proximal abutment to prevent an uncovering of the needle by movement of the guard in a proximal direction.
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11. A device as recited in claim 10 wherein the guard is sequentially moveable over the needle from an initial position wherein the cantilevered tab is urged against the first abutment and a distal portion of the needle extends from the guard, followed by a movement of the guard in the second direction
- 5 to a retracted position wherein the cantilevered tab is released from the first abutment for transition to its unstressed configuration with further exposure of the needle, and a subsequent movement of the guard in the first direction to a final position wherein the guard covers the distal portion of the needle and the extension limiter is engaged with the proximal abutment to prevent an
- 10 uncovering of the distal portion of the needle.
12. A device as recited in claim 11 further comprising a cover engageable with the holder to cover the distal portion of the needle when the needle is in its initial position.
13. A device as recited in claim 12 further comprising a plurality of
- 15 longitudinally oriented ribs mounted on the inner surface of the holder, the ribs individually extending from the inner surface of the holder with each rib having a detent for a snap engagement with the adapter.
14. A device as recited in claim 13 wherein the surface of the guard is formed with a pair of axially oriented ridges to create a groove for receiving
- 20 one of the ribs therein to prevent rotation of the guard in the holder, and wherein the ridges urge against the holder to prevent movement in the first direction when the needle is in its final position.

15. A device as recited in claim 14 wherein the needle has a beveled first end and a second end, and wherein the adapter further comprises a pair of prongs extending therefrom to straddle the ribs to orient the needle and prevent a rotation of the adapter about the axis.

5 16. A device as recited in claim 10 wherein the needle is an aspiration needle.

17. A method for aspirating fluid which comprises the steps of:
providing a device having a substantially tubular shaped holder
defining a longitudinal axis and having an inner surface surrounding a
lumen, a distal abutment formed on the inner surface of the holder, a
5 proximal abutment formed on the inner surface of the holder, an
adapter with the needle mounted thereon, the adapter being affixed to
the inner surface of the holder to align the needle along the axis, a
substantially tubular shaped guard, wherein the guard is formed with a
lumen for receiving the needle therein and is positioned in the lumen of
10 the holder for reciprocal axial movement over the needle in a distal
direction and in a proximal direction with an outer surface of the guard
facing the inner surface of the holder, a cantilevered tab formed on the
guard, wherein the tab is deflectable from the outer surface of the
guard and into a stressed configuration for engagement with the distal
15 abutment to prevent movement of the guard in a distal direction, and
further wherein, in response to a proximal movement of the guard, the
tab is released from its stressed configuration for movement into an
unstressed configuration wherein the cantilevered tab is flush with the
outer surface of the guard and clear of any interaction with the holder,
20 a spring positioned in the lumen of the guard between the guard and
the adapter to urge the guard in a distal direction along the axis to
cover the needle when the cantilevered tab is in its unstressed
configuration and an extension limiter formed on the guard and
engageable with the proximal abutment to prevent an uncovering of the
25 needle by movement of the guard in a proximal direction;
engaging the needle in fluid communication with the fluid source
to move the guard from an initial position wherein the cantilevered tab
is urged against the first abutment and a distal portion of the needle
extends from the guard to a retracted position wherein the cantilevered
30 tab is released from the first abutment for transition to its unstressed
configuration with further exposure of the needle;

5 withdrawing the needle from the fluid source to move the guard from the retracted position to a final position wherein the guard covers the distal portion of the needle and the extension limiter is engaged with the proximal abutment to prevent an uncovering of the distal portion of the needle; and
 discarding the device.

18. A method as recited in claim 17 further comprising the step of removing a cover from the holder to expose the distal portion of the needle when the needle is in its initial position.

10 19. A method as recited in claim 17 wherein the device further comprises a plurality of longitudinally oriented ribs mounted on the inner surface of the holder, the ribs individually extending from the inner surface of the holder with each rib having a detent for a snap engagement with the adapter, and wherein the surface of the guard is formed with a pair of axially oriented ridges to create a groove for receiving one of the ribs therein to prevent rotation of the guard in the holder, and further wherein the ridges urge against the holder to prevent movement in the first direction when the needle is in its final position.

15 20. A method as recited in claim 17 wherein the needle has a beveled first end and a second end, and wherein the adapter further comprises a pair of prongs extending therefrom to straddle the ribs to orient the needle and prevent a rotation of the adapter about the axis.